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ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1, SECTION 2**Bob
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Top secret agency in the open now

The advertisement appeared on the classifieds page of a major newspaper. The sponsoring company was seeking communications systems engineers. It was an informative, well-written ad, doubtless one that would prove of interest to anyone in that particular field who was looking for a job.

The most interesting thing about the ad, though, was the company's name, which was displayed in tasteful, moderate-sized type at the bottom:

"Central Intelligence Agency."

The ad began:

"If you're a communications system engineer in search of a stimulating professional environment where you will implement many of the latest advantages in the telecommunications field, the Central Intelligence Agency can offer you an excellent career opportunity."

The job classification was spelled out:

"You will develop and implement the latest in secure telecommunications systems as part of a very select group of men and women dedicated to providing the Agency with the very best telecommunications possible. And you'll receive the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you're making vital contributions to your country."

In case a prospective employee needed persuading, there was this:

"The CIA offers competitive salaries and an attractive benefits package. Growth potential is excellent. Positions are available in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.—a fascinating area featuring museums, theaters, universities, monuments and much more."

The company included its slogan:

"CIA . . . Where Vital Information Depends On You."

And in small type, there was the notation:

"The CIA is an Equal Opportunity Employer."

Well . . . I suppose we should rejoice that it has come to this. The CIA is out in the open.

advertising for help, right on the classifieds page, just like modeling agencies and flight attendant training schools.

This has been evolving for some time now. CIA officials, both current and former, used to be as invisible as ghosts; lately they've been turning up on news-interview shows as frequently as White House staff members.

And the word is that CIA recruiters are doing a brisk business on America's college campuses.

But somehow I feel a little nostalgic for those dear, departed days when the CIA was more than anonymous; it was downright frightening. When the CIA was the one institution in American life so secretive that people were virtually afraid even to talk about it.

You remember those days. Whenever there was dirty dealing in any part of the world, whispers started saying that it was a "CIA plot." Whenever a mysterious person appeared in the midst of a political gathering, those in the know said that he was a "CIA operative." Whenever unexplained money turned up in a place where it was not supposed to be, certain people said that it was "laundered CIA funds."

Now . . . for all I know, a lot of this may have been true. The CIA was never the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts, and we'll probably never be told everything that the agency is up to.

But somewhere along the line, a conscious decision seems to have been made to launch a CIA public relations offensive. If the exact missions of the agency are not public knowledge, at least a concerted effort seems to have been begun to persuade us that the agency itself is not such a dark, unknown entity. It used to be that we imagined the CIA shrouded away in some camouflaged hillside bunker, covered by trees and foliage and protected by submachine gun nests; now we seem to be asked to regard the agency as just another happy part of our federal government bureaucracy at work—sort of like a spy-ridden version of the Department of Agriculture.

This is both good and bad. It's probably healthy that the CIA has implicitly admitted that it is accountable to the American people, and that it should exist out in the open, where we can be aware of it every day.

But there was something sort of creepily exciting, eerily enticing about thinking that there was one agency of the American government that was so clandestine we weren't even supposed to say its name out loud. Even Secret Service agents were right out there where we could see them, with enamel lapel pins on their coats and wires running up to their ears. But a CIA man? You could never get anyone to admit to being one of those.

Now you turn on "Nightline" or "Face the Nation," and if you don't see someone who's running the CIA now, you're at least likely to see someone who was running it a couple of years ago. And if the CIA people you see on TV aren't impressive enough for you, all you have to do is answer the ad on the classifieds page and you might end up as a CIA employee yourself.

Oh, well. The world changes. Life runs in cycles, and we rethink what we've always believed, and the CIA is an equal opportunity employer. Carry on.